

Booker, Matthew Scott. *Confluence: Ecology and Culture at the Forks of the Willamette River, Oregon*. 1997. University of Oregon Master's Thesis. (Reviewed by Alexis Steinberg)

In a University of Oregon Master of Science Degree Thesis, Matthew Booker investigates the historically diverse attitudes that people have had toward the confluence of the Coast and Middle Forks of the Willamette River and how these attitudes have played out on the river environment. Booker addresses the ecological history of the Willamette River, including its historical use by the Kalapuya Indians, Euroamerican settlers and their descendants.

The Thesis is presented chronologically. Booker first briefly describes the geological formation of the Willamette River Basin and surrounding area. The long-term occupation of the Kalapuya is discussed next, with an emphasis on *how* this Native American group used the land. The Kalapuya utilized the “confluence” seasonally for food and resources. They were highly adapted to the Willamette River cycles, including regular flooding as and the wet, cool climate, wherein they relied on camas lily bulb harvesting for subsistence. The Kalapuya used canoes for transport along the rivers and manipulated the landscape through annual burnings so as to maintain prairies.

The next time period described begins with Euroamerican exploration and settlement from the 1800s through the 1900s. The first non-Natives in the area were beaver trappers working for the Hudson Bay Company. Early settlers used the Willamette River Basin's trees for firewood and were involved in complicated relationships with the Kalapuya. By the early twentieth-century, the use of agriculture brought irrigation, flood control and crop diversification. Gravel extraction and reservoir construction began in the 1940s, around the time of increased industrialization and large-scale logging. Questions about river pollution and loss of water quality began to circulate and efforts were made to restore the river environment. Throughout the mid-1900s, technological advances, increased residential development and dam construction meant an increasing use of the river as a commodity. Booker argues that recently, there is an increased understanding of the human impacts on the Willamette but that we should still be asking questions related to the preservation and restoration of this ecosystem.

Booker dedicates his Thesis “Towards a healthy relationship between people and the land” (viii), arguing for the increasing need of human adaptation to the Willamette River environment instead of our continued attempt to control it.

Critique

Booker's Thesis could possibly summarize the entire “Natural History” topic related to the Willamette River. As an environmental scientist, he provides an account that emphasizes the role that the river environment plays within human history. Booker is sensitive to the destructive impacts that humans have historically had on this area but in context, he presents unbiased information. In reading this Thesis, I feel that I have a better appreciation of the Willamette basin and its unique ecological richness. I feel that Booker's work is an incredibly valuable resource and should be required reading for anyone

interested in Willamette Valley natural history. Generally, Booker provides a summary and culmination of many other sources. He lists an extensive bibliography at the end of his work.

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